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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 002134

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DART ASSESSMENT OF KARBALA

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SUMMARY  
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1. DART Field Team West traveled to Karbala to meet with local officials and gather assessment information on 15 May. The population is generally friendly and happy with the Coalition presence. There have been neither threats to Coalition forces nor targeted incidents. Sixty Iraqi police officers have been trained by Coalition forces with police experience. There are a total of 830 police officers now active in Karbala. End Summary.

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FOOD  
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2. The DART met with U.N. World Food Program (WFP) staff, Ministry of Trade (MOT) silo manager, and Coalition forces. The DART discussed overall food needs in Karbala area and confirmed positive WFP assessment of the public distribution system (PDS), observed initial arrivals of WFP rice deliveries, and confirmed wheat grain stocks in the Karbala grain silo.

3. WFP's ten-person national staff is established and operational at the MOT warehouse. Two additional staff, office and communications equipment, and other operational support are due to arrive soon. WFP has assisted MOT in planning initial PDS activities, including the release of wheat grain for milling, followed by a flour delivery to beneficiaries beginning on 17 May and a rice distribution to begin the first part of June.

4. The DART confirmed that the Coalition has vacated the grain silo property. The MOT silo manager claims that Coalition forces removed property from the silo grounds and has presented an inventory of missing items to battalion headquarters. The DART discussed this issue with a Coalition representative who stated that he would follow-up to determine a course of action. Among the items on the MOT list are two tractor-trailer cabs, tools, several computers, office furniture, and cash from the office safe. WFP staff and silo manager asked DART to inquire about security assistance from Coalition forces during the upcoming food deliveries. The Coalition source told the DART that frequent patrols and visible presence by Coalition forces in the area of the silo and warehouses could be established and stated that he would follow-up for possible action.

5. WFP stated that public service messages regarding PDS had been received and should be improved. Information should be focused on instructions to food agents and should include precise dates for ration distributions, the per person quantity of food to be received and the ration basket contents. Beneficiaries will be expecting this information as a normal function of PDS.

6. WFP and DART discovered unexploded ordnance (UXO) in one area of the MOT warehouse complex. DART requested and received an initial UXO assessment by Coalition forces that confirmed UXO contamination. A request for UXO removal and a general mine sweep of the warehouse area has been made with a planned sweep set for 18 May.

7. The DART confirmed that all MOT staff in Karbala received USD 20 emergency payments and is in contact with MOT Baghdad.

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SECURITY  
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18. Challenges in Karbala include a large minefield near the "Karbala gap" close to the main cemetery; significant amounts of UXOs in the city; and the "Karbala Protection Force" (KPF) who are to be disbanded by Saturday and have acted as a separate, vigilante type police force with considerable criminal element. There are, however, joint patrols with Coalition forces, the police, and the KPF.

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MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS  
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19. There are newspapers in Karbala, and the former state TV station is operating six hours per day. Included in the broadcast are UXO and public health messages. Of Karbala's population, 40 to 50 percent own televisions, and the rest rely on coffee shops and restaurants to get TV news and programming.

110. Interviews with local residents provided mixed reviews of Radio SAWA. The biggest complaints were repetitive news and music. The most popular news broadcast was BBC. Many asked the DART why they could no longer receive Voice of America.

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COALITION PRIORITIES FOR KARBALA  
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11. The DART witnessed a well-organized and proficient effort by Coalition forces to restore services to Karbala. The DART was briefed on several rehabilitation priorities for Karbala including:

-- Police professionalism and training: A 30-officer training cadre has been established to increase proficiency of local police forces. Coalition forces are supporting the Karbala Police Department by providing uniforms, communications equipment, vehicles, weapons and ammunition.

-- Disbanding former militia: The Karbala Protective Force has been deemed antagonistic to rehabilitation efforts and will be disbanded by Coalition forces.

-- Water: The water system is functioning, but it is contaminated and contributes to chronic gastro-intestinal problems among Karbala populace. Four water purification units have been provided for Karbala hospitals. The water administration headquarters functions at 50 percent and a secure chlorine supply is needed. The International Rescue Committee and CARE are present and working on water problems.

-- Electricity: Electricity is reported at pre-war levels of 75 percent. Coalition forces are repairing suspension and transmission lines.

-- Education: One hundred-thirty school buildings have been cleared of UXO, and battalion teams have begun renovation of five school buildings for various levels of students, including adults. Textbooks and curriculum development were identified as priority needs.

-- Fuel: There have been no LPG deliveries in the last 30 days and benzene is in short supply.

-- Refuse and Sewage: Coalition forces have established a garbage landfill outside town limits, but it is under-utilized. The former regime flooded the sewage system with diesel fuel rendering the system inoperable.

-- UXO and mines are considered a serious and long-term issue. Coalition forces have been mapping UXO sites, and removal teams are in the area.

-- Civil Administration: A city council has been appointed, but it is untrained and not yet vetted.

112. Many of these priorities will increase employment opportunities. Coalition forces estimate unemployment to be as high as 85 to 90 percent.

JONES